



State of California – Natural Resources Agency

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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January 13, 2023

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GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor

CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the SR-39 Reopening Project SCH #2022120019, Los Angeles County

Dear Mr. Price:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has reviewed the Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans; Lead Agency) for the SR-39 Reopening Project (Project). Supporting documents were requested and the Project Study Report-Project Development Support dated April 29, 2019 was received. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations regarding those activities involved in the Project that may affect California fish and wildlife. Likewise, we appreciate the opportunity to provide comments regarding those aspects of the Project that CDFW, by law, may be required to carry out or approve through the exercise of its own regulatory authority under the Fish and Game Code.

CDFW's Role

CDFW is California's Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources and holds those resources in trust by statute for all the people of the State [Fish & G. Code, §§ 711.7, subdivision (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, § 15386, subdivision (a)]. CDFW, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (Id., § 1802). Similarly, for purposes of CEQA, CDFW is charged by law to provide, as available, biological expertise during public agency environmental review efforts, focusing specifically on projects and related activities that have the potential to adversely affect State fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW is also submitting comments as a Responsible Agency under CEQA (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381). CDFW expects that it may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code, including lake and streambed alteration regulatory authority (Fish & G. Code, § 1600 *et seq.*). Likewise, to the extent implementation of the Project as proposed may result in "take", as defined by State law, of any species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 *et seq.*), or CESA-listed rare plant pursuant to the Native Plant Protection Act (NPPA);

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Fish & G. Code, §1900 *et seq.*), CDFW recommends the Project proponent obtain appropriate authorization under the Fish and Game Code.

Project Description and Summary

Objective: The Project proposes to rehabilitate and reopen a 4.4-mile segment of State Route 39 (SR-39) connecting the San Gabriel Valley to the Angeles Crest Highway. This segment of road has been closed to public highway traffic since 1978 due to roadway damage. In 2003, it was restored for emergency service vehicles, but still constricted as it approaches its northern terminus. The five proposed project alternatives are as follows:

Alternative 1: No Build

The "No-Build Alternative" proposes to maintain the existing conditions of the roadway without any improvements.

Alternative 2: Evacuation Route (Minimum Build)

This alternative proposes limited roadway restoration. Access to the roadway would be strictly for emergency service responders and maintenance access. The roadway would continue to be closed to public highway traffic.

Alternative 3: Active Transportation Access (shuttle and bicycle path facilities)

This alternative proposes to restrict access to the roadway to recreational related activities (e.g., enjoying vista views, hiking, biking, picnicking, camping, fishing, etc.) and allow only on-site shuttle service to operate and ferry national forest visitors through the restricted roadway adhering to a maximum speed of 15 mph and exercising extreme caution at well-marked wildlife crossings. This alternative also proposes two sustainable public parking areas (at PM 40.0 & PM 44.4) to be constructed for visitors to park their vehicles and bikes. The main structural features include one major viaduct structure, two rock-sheds, and six soldier pile retaining walls.

Alternative 4: Full Opening

This alternative proposes to rehabilitate and reopen the closed segment of SR-39 to public traffic and provide unrestricted access and a through-traffic connection between I-210 and SR-2. A roundabout feature is also proposed at the SR-2/SR-39 intersection. No parking lots are proposed for this alternative. The main structural features include one major viaduct structure, two rock-sheds, three viaduct/wildlife crossing structures, wildlife fencing, and six soldier pile retaining walls.

Alternative 5: Viaduct Construction

This alternative proposes to construct a 4.4-mile-long standard two-lane elevated viaduct structure adjacent to the existing roadway. The continuous elevated viaduct would bypass the slide area, connect SR-39 to SR-2, and allow wildlife, slide debris, and water runoff to pass underneath the highway. The proposed viaduct section would consist of a 10-foot-wide outside shoulder and a 12-foot-wide lane in each direction. This alternative would restore public highway traffic connecting SR-39 to SR-2.

Alternative 6 – Single Travel Lane

This alternative proposes to construct a single travel lane having a total roadway width of 20 feet (12-foot travel lane with a 4-foot-wide shoulder on each side of the travel lane). Main features include three viaduct/wildlife crossing structures and wildlife fencing. The lane would be

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shared by all traffic with limited speeds and room to pull over and allow on-coming vehicles to pass safely.

Location: The Project site is located on SR-39, from post mile 40.0 to 44.4, within the Los Angeles National Forest, in Los Angeles County.

Comments and Recommendations

CDFW offers the comments and recommendations below to assist Caltrans in adequately identifying, avoiding, and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, direct, and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. CDFW looks forward to commenting on the DEIR when it is released. CDFW may have additional comments to the DEIR not addressed in this letter.

Specific Comments

- 1) Bighorn Sheep. Bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) occupy habitat within the proposed Project limits and the Project area encompasses critical lambing habitat. The northernmost section of SR-39 bisects the documented home range of the Twin Peaks group of the San Gabriel bighorn sheep population. Bighorn sheep are classified as Fully Protected under Fish and Game Code section 4700. Fully Protected species may not be taken or possessed at any time, and no licenses or permits may be issued for their take. Therefore, the proposed Project may not subject bighorn sheep to lethal or non-lethal take.

Bighorn sheep response to various degrees of human disturbance has been evaluated in numerous studies. It is well documented that bighorn sheep avoid road corridors, and high-use areas can reduce the use of potential suitable habitat (Papouchis et al 2001; Keller 2007). Based on this data, the Twin Peaks group may avoid crossing to the east side of SR-39 during construction and after Project completion of Alternatives 2 through 6. Therefore, the Project would limit the Twin Peaks group from utilizing Snow Spring, Crystal Lake, additional over-summering habitat located on the east side of SR-39, and genetic exchange with adjacent East Fork San Gabriel River group. A reduction in important habitat could result in decreased survival and lamb production (Keller 2007). The reopening of the road to public use will also increase human recreation within the Project vicinity, and human recreation has been implicated in the decline of several populations of desert bighorn sheep (Papouchis et al 2001).

Project Alternatives 2 through 6 will have temporary and long-term impacts on local bighorn sheep populations. CDFW cannot permit take of this species. Therefore, CDFW recommends the No-Build Alternative to avoid take of the fully protected species. CDFW recommends the DEIR thoroughly discuss the potential impacts the proposed alternatives would have on bighorn sheep. CDFW also recommends including a detailed analysis of construction and the expected increase of long-term human disturbance the Project will have on this species relative to the No-Build Alternative.

- 2) Aquatic and Riparian Resources. The Project site includes several streams, including several unnamed tributaries to Bear Creek as part of the San Gabriel River watershed. As a Responsible Agency under CEQA, CDFW has authority over activities in streams and/or lakes that will divert or obstruct the natural flow, or change the bed, channel, or bank

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(including vegetation associated with the stream or lake) of a river or stream, or use material from a streambed. For any such activities, the project applicant (or "entity") must provide written notification to CDFW pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 1600 *et seq.*

- a. CDFW's issuance of a Lake and Streambed Alteration (LSA) Agreement for a project that is subject to CEQA will require CEQA compliance actions by CDFW as a Responsible Agency. As a Responsible Agency, CDFW may consider the environmental document of the local jurisdiction (Lead Agency) for the project. To minimize additional requirements by CDFW pursuant to section 1600 *et seq.* and/or under CEQA, the environmental document should fully identify the potential impacts to the stream or riparian resources and provide adequate avoidance, mitigation, monitoring and reporting commitments for issuance of the LSA Agreement. Please visit CDFW's [Lake and Streambed Alteration Program](#) webpage for information about LSA Notification (CDFWe 2020).
 - b. In the event the project area may support aquatic, riparian, and wetland habitats; a preliminary delineation of the streams and their associated riparian habitats should be included in the environmental document. The delineation should be conducted pursuant to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) wetland definition adopted by CDFW (Cowardin et al. 1979). Be advised that some wetland and riparian habitats subject to CDFW's authority may extend beyond the jurisdictional limits of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Section 404 permit and Regional Water Quality Control Board Section 401 Certification.
 - c. In project areas which may support ephemeral or episodic streams, herbaceous vegetation, woody vegetation, and woodlands also serve to protect the integrity of these resources and help maintain natural sedimentation processes; therefore, CDFW recommends effective setbacks be established to maintain appropriately-sized vegetated buffer areas adjoining ephemeral drainages.
 - d. Project-related changes in upstream and downstream drainage patterns, runoff, and sedimentation should be included and evaluated in the environmental document.
 - e. As part of the LSA Notification process, CDFW requests a hydrological evaluation of the 100, 50, 25, 10, 5, and 2-year frequency storm event for existing and proposed conditions. CDFW recommends the environmental document evaluate the results and address avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures that may be necessary to reduce potential significant impacts.
- 3) Wildlife Corridor and Connectivity. The Project may impact wildlife movement and fragment natural habitat areas/open space. The Project site is surrounded by natural areas that provide essential habitat connectivity within the San Gabriel Mountains (CDFW 2017). The Project would result in increased traffic which could impede natural wildlife movement. Habitat loss and fragmentation due to roads and development has driven the southern California mountain lion population towards extinction (Yap et al. 2019). Maintaining wildlife corridors and habitat continuity is essential for wildlife survival and is increasingly important considering habitat loss and climate change. CDFW recommends the DEIR include current wildlife activity and movement data through the Project site. The results, including mapped data, and a discussion of how the Project may affect wildlife movement and dispersal should

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be provided. The DEIR should also include mitigation measures that would address the reduction of wildlife corridor and impacts to wildlife movement.

- 4) Nesting Birds. The Project will require removal or disturbance of trees, shrubs, and grasslands that could support nesting birds and raptors. Accordingly, Project construction and activities may impact nesting birds and raptors. Project activities occurring during the bird and raptor breeding and nesting season could result in the incidental loss of fertile eggs or nestlings, or otherwise lead to nest abandonment. The Project may also lead to the temporal or permanent loss of nesting habitat for birds and raptors.
- a. Migratory nongame native bird species are protected by international treaty under the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918 (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 50, § 10.13). Sections 3503, 3503.5, and 3513 of the California Fish and Game Code prohibit take of all birds and their active nests including raptors and other migratory nongame birds (as listed under the Federal MBTA). It is unlawful to take, possess, or needlessly destroy the nest or eggs of any raptor.
 - b. CDFW recommends that measures be taken to fully avoid Project impacts to nesting birds and raptors. Proposed Project-related ground-disturbing activities (e.g., mobilizing, staging, drilling, and excavating) and vegetation removal should occur outside of the avian breeding season which generally runs from February 15 through August 31 (as early as January 1 for some raptors) to avoid take of birds, raptors, or their eggs.
 - c. If impacts to nesting birds and raptors cannot be avoided, the DEIR should include a discussion of why avoidance is not feasible. In addition, CDFW recommends the DEIR include measures to mitigate for impacts. CDFW recommends surveys by a qualified biologist with experience conducting breeding bird and raptor surveys. Surveys are needed to detect protected native birds and raptors occurring in suitable nesting habitat that may be disturbed and any other such habitat within 300 feet of the Project disturbance area, to the extent allowable and accessible. For raptors, this radius should be expanded to 500 feet and 0.5 mile for special status species. Project personnel, including all contractors working on site, should be instructed on the sensitivity of the area. Reductions in the nest buffer distance may be appropriate depending on the avian species involved, ambient levels of human activity, screening vegetation, or possibly other factors
 - d. CDFW recommends the DEIR provide an analysis of the expected increase in human presence and any subsequent change in traffic, noise level and frequency, and artificial lighting relative to a no build alternative. Using these expected elevated levels of human-driven disturbances, further consideration should be given to potential impacts to birds and raptors nesting within and adjacent to the Project site.
 - e. It should be noted that the temporary exclusion of Project activities within nesting buffers during nesting season may not constitute effective mitigation for the purposes of offsetting Project impacts associated with the loss of breeding and nesting habitat. Effective mitigation for impacts to nesting habitat for birds and raptors requires structurally (e.g., ground cover, subshrubs, shrubs, and trees) and species diverse vegetation as part of habitat restoration.

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- f. Additional mitigation, separate from impacts to vegetation communities, should be considered to compensate for the temporal or permanent loss of occupied nesting habitat within the Project site. Depending on the status of the bird or raptor species impacted, replacement habitat acres should increase with the occurrence of a California Species of Special Concern (SCC). Replacement habitat acres should further increase with the occurrence of a CESA-listed threatened or endangered species.
- 5) Bats. Numerous bat species are known to roost in trees and structures throughout Los Angeles County (Remington and Cooper 2014). The Project site contains areas of that could support bat roosts.
- a. Bats are considered non-game mammals and are afforded protection by state law from take and/or harassment (Fish & G. Code, § 4150; Cal. Code of Regs., § 251.1). Project construction and activities, including (but not limited to) ground disturbance, vegetation removal, and any activities leading to increased noise levels may have direct and/or indirect impacts on bats and roosts.
 - b. CDFW recommends the DEIR provide a thorough discussion and adequate disclosure of potential impacts to bats and roosts from Project construction and activities including (but not limited to) ground-disturbing activities (e.g., mobilizing, staging, drilling, and excavating) and vegetation removal. If necessary, to reduce impacts to less than significant, the DEIR should provide bat-specific avoidance and/or mitigation measures [CEQA Guidelines, § 15126.4(a)(1)].

General Comments

- 1) Disclosure. An environmental document should provide an adequate, complete, and detailed disclosure about the effect which a proposed project is likely to have on the environment (Pub. Resources Code, § 20161; CEQA Guidelines, §15151). Adequate disclosure is necessary so CDFW may provide comments on the adequacy of proposed avoidance, minimization, or mitigation measures, as well as to assess the significance of the specific impact relative to the species (e.g., current range, distribution, population trends, and connectivity).
- 2) Mitigation Measures. Public agencies have a duty under CEQA to prevent significant, avoidable damage to the environment by requiring changes in projects through the use of feasible alternatives or mitigation measures [CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15002(a)(3), 15021]. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15126.4, an environmental document shall describe feasible measures which could mitigate for impacts below a significant level under CEQA.
 - a) Level of Detail. Mitigation measures must be feasible, effective, implemented, and fully enforceable/imposed by the lead agency through permit conditions, agreements, or other legally binding instruments (Pub. Resources Code, § 21081.6(b); CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15126.4, 15041). A public agency shall provide the measures that are fully enforceable through permit conditions, agreements, or other measures (Pub. Resources Code, § 21081.6). CDFW recommends that Caltrans prepare mitigation measures that are specific, detailed (i.e., responsible party, timing, specific actions, location), and clear in order for a measure to be fully enforceable and implemented

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successfully via a mitigation monitoring and/or reporting program (CEQA Guidelines, § 15097; Pub. Resources Code, § 21081.6). Adequate disclosure is necessary so CDFW may provide comments on the adequacy and feasibility of proposed mitigation measures.

- b) Disclosure of Impacts. If a proposed mitigation measure would cause one or more significant effects, in addition to impacts caused by the Project as proposed, the environmental document should include a discussion of the effects of proposed mitigation measures [CEQA Guidelines, § 15126.4(a)(1)]. In that regard, the environmental document should provide an adequate, complete, and detailed disclosure about a project's proposed mitigation measure(s). Adequate disclosure is necessary so CDFW may assess the potential impacts of proposed mitigation measures.
- 3) Biological Baseline Assessment. An adequate biological resources assessment should provide a complete assessment and impact analysis of the flora and fauna within and adjacent to a project site and where a project may result in ground disturbance. The assessment and analysis should place emphasis upon identifying endangered, threatened, sensitive, regionally, and locally unique species, and sensitive habitats. Impact analysis will aid in determining any direct, indirect, and cumulative biological impacts, as well as specific mitigation or avoidance measures necessary to offset those impacts. CDFW recommends avoiding any sensitive natural communities found on or adjacent to a project. CDFW also considers impacts to Species of Special Concern a significant direct and cumulative adverse effect without implementing appropriate avoid and/or mitigation measures. A project-level environmental document should include the following information:
 - a) Information on the regional setting that is critical to an assessment of environmental impacts, with special emphasis on resources that are rare or unique to the region [CEQA Guidelines, § 15125(c)]. An environmental document should include measures to fully avoid and otherwise protect Sensitive Natural Communities from project-related impacts. CDFW considers these communities as threatened habitats having both regional and local significance. Plant communities, alliances, and associations with a state-wide ranking of S1, S2, S3 and S4 should be considered sensitive and declining at the local and regional level. These ranks can be obtained by visiting [Vegetation Classification and Mapping Program - Natural Communities](#) webpage (CDFWa 2020);
 - b) A thorough, recent, floristic-based assessment of special status plants and natural communities following CDFW's [Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities](#) (CDFW 2018). Adjoining habitat areas should be included where project construction and activities could lead to direct or indirect impacts off site;
 - c) Floristic, alliance- and/or association-based mapping and vegetation impact assessments conducted at a project site and within the neighboring vicinity. The [Manual of California Vegetation](#) (MCV), second edition, should also be used to inform this mapping and assessment (Sawyer et al. 2009). Adjoining habitat areas should be included in this assessment where project activities could lead to direct or indirect impacts off site. Habitat mapping at the alliance level will help establish

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baseline vegetation conditions;

- d) A complete, recent, assessment of the biological resources associated with each habitat type on site and within adjacent areas that could also be affected by a project. CDFW's [California Natural Diversity Database](#) (CNDDDB) in Sacramento should be contacted to obtain current information on any previously reported sensitive species and habitat (CDFWb 2020). An assessment should include a nine-quadrangle search of the CNDDDB to determine a list of species potentially present at a project site. A lack of records in the CNDDDB does not mean that rare, threatened, or endangered plants and wildlife do not occur in the project site. Field verification for the presence or absence of sensitive species is necessary to provide a complete biological assessment for adequate CEQA review [CEQA Guidelines, § 15003(i)];
 - e) A complete, recent, assessment of rare, threatened, and endangered, and other sensitive species on site and within the area of potential effect, including California Species of Special Concern, and California Fully Protected Species (Fish & G. Code, §§ 3511, 4700, 5050, and 5515). Species to be addressed should include all those which meet the CEQA definition of endangered, rare, or threatened species (CEQA Guidelines, § 15380). Seasonal variations in use of a project site should also be addressed such as wintering, roosting, nesting, and foraging habitat. Focused species-specific surveys, conducted at the appropriate time of year and time of day when the sensitive species are active or otherwise identifiable, may be required if suitable habitat is present. See CDFW's [Survey and Monitoring Protocols and Guidelines](#) for established survey protocol for select species (CDFWc 2020). Acceptable species-specific survey procedures may be developed in consultation with CDFW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and,
 - f) A recent wildlife and rare plant survey, including Peirson's lupine, San Gabriel Mountains dudleya, and San Gabriel manzanita. CDFW generally considers biological field assessments for wildlife to be valid for a one-year period, and assessments for rare plants may be considered valid for a period of up to three years. Some aspects of a proposed project may warrant periodic updated surveys for certain sensitive taxa, particularly if build out could occur over a protracted time frame or in phases.
 - g) A biological resources survey should include identification and delineation of any rivers, streams, and lakes and their associated natural plant communities/habitats. This includes any culverts, ditches, storm channels that may transport water, sediment, pollutants, and discharge into rivers, streams, and lakes.
- 4) Data. CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports be incorporated into a database which may be used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations [Pub. Resources Code, § 21003, subd. (e)]. Accordingly, please report any special status species and natural communities detected by completing and submitting [CNDDDB Field Survey Forms](#) (CDFWd). Caltrans should ensure data collected at a project-level has been properly submitted, with all data fields applicable filled out. The data entry should also list pending development as a threat and then update this occurrence after impacts have occurred.

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- 5) Biological Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts. CDFW recommends providing a thorough discussion of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts expected to adversely affect biological resources, with specific measures to offset such impacts. The DEIR should address the following:
- a) A discussion regarding Project-related indirect impacts on biological resources, including resources in nearby public lands, open space, adjacent natural habitats, riparian ecosystems, and any designated and/or proposed or existing reserve lands [e.g., preserve lands associated with a Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP, Fish & G. Code, § 2800 et. seq.)]. Impacts on, and maintenance of, wildlife corridor/movement areas, including access to undisturbed habitats in adjacent areas, should be fully evaluated in the DEIR;
 - b) A discussion of both the short-term and long-term effects to species population distribution and concentration and alterations of the ecosystem supporting the species impacted [CEQA Guidelines, § 15126.2(a)];
 - c) A discussion of potential adverse impacts from lighting, noise, temporary and permanent human activity, and exotic species, and identification of any mitigation measures;
 - d) A discussion on Project-related changes on drainage patterns; the volume, velocity, and frequency of existing and post-Project surface flows; polluted runoff; soil erosion and/or sedimentation in streams and water bodies; and, post-Project fate of runoff from the Project sites. The discussion should also address the potential water extraction activities and the potential resulting impacts on the habitat (if any) supported by the groundwater. Mitigation measures proposed to alleviate such Project impacts should be included;
 - e) An analysis of impacts from proposed changes to land use designations and zoning, and existing land use designation and zoning located nearby or adjacent to natural areas that may inadvertently contribute to wildlife-human interactions. A discussion of possible conflicts and mitigation measures to reduce these conflicts should be included in the DEIR; and,
 - f) A cumulative effects analysis, as described under CEQA Guidelines section 15130. General and specific plans, as well as past, present, and anticipated future projects, should be analyzed relative to their impacts on similar plant and wildlife species, habitat, and vegetation communities. If Caltrans determines that the Project would not have a cumulative impact, the environmental document should indicate why the cumulative impact is not significant. Caltrans' conclusion should be supported by facts and analyses [CEQA Guidelines, § 15130(a)(2)].
- 6) Project Description and Alternatives. To enable CDFW to adequately review and comment on the proposed Project from the standpoint of the protection of plants, fish, and wildlife, we recommend the following information be included in the DEIR:
- a) A complete discussion of the purpose and need for, and description of, the proposed Project;

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- b) CEQA Guidelines section 15126.6(a) states that an environmental document shall describe a reasonable range of potentially feasible alternatives to the Project, or to the location of the Project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the Project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the Project. CEQA Guidelines section 15126.6(f)(2) states if the Lead Agency concludes that no feasible alternative locations exist, it must disclose the reasons for this conclusion and should include reasons in the environmental document;
- c) A range of feasible alternatives to Project component location and design features to avoid or otherwise minimize direct and indirect impacts to sensitive biological resources and wildlife movement areas. CDFW recommends Caltrans consider configuring Project construction and activities, as well as the development footprint, in such a way as to fully avoid impacts to sensitive and special status plants and wildlife species, habitat, and sensitive vegetation communities. CDFW also recommends Caltrans consider establishing appropriate setbacks from sensitive and special status biological resources. Setbacks should not be impacted by ground disturbance or hydrological changes for the duration of the Project and from any future development. As a general rule, CDFW recommends reducing or clustering the development footprint to retain unobstructed spaces for vegetation and wildlife and provide connections for wildlife between properties and minimize obstacles to open space.

Project alternatives should be thoroughly evaluated, even if an alternative would impede, to some degree, the attainment of the Project objectives or would be more costly (CEQA Guidelines, § 15126.6); and,

- d) Where the Project may impact aquatic and riparian resources, CDFW recommends Caltrans consider alternatives that would fully avoid impacts to such resources. CDFW also recommends alternatives that would allow not impede, alter, or otherwise modify existing surface flow; watercourse and meander; and water-dependent ecosystems and vegetation communities. Project-related designs should consider elevated crossings to avoid channelizing or narrowing of streams. Any modifications to a river, creek, or stream may cause or magnify upstream bank erosion, channel incision, and drop in water level and cause the stream to alter its course of flow.
- 7) CESA. CDFW considers adverse impacts to a species protected by CESA to be significant without mitigation under CEQA. As to CESA, take of any endangered, threatened, candidate species, or CESA-listed plant species that results from the Project is prohibited, except as authorized by state law (Fish & G. Code §§ 2080, 2085; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, §786.9). Consequently, if the Project or any Project-related activity during the life of the Project will result in take of a species designated as endangered or threatened, or a candidate for listing under CESA, CDFW recommends that the Project proponent seek appropriate take authorization under CESA prior to implementing the Project. Appropriate authorization from CDFW may include an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) or a consistency determination in certain circumstances, among other options [Fish & Game Code, §§ 2080.1, 2081, subds. (b) and (c)]. Early consultation is encouraged, as significant modification to a Project and mitigation measures may be required in order to obtain a CESA Permit. Revisions to the Fish and Game Code, effective January 1998, may require that CDFW issue a separate CEQA

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document for the issuance of an ITP unless the Project CEQA document addresses all Project impacts to CESA-listed species and specifies a mitigation monitoring and reporting program that will meet the requirements of an ITP. For these reasons, biological mitigation monitoring and reporting proposals should be of sufficient detail and resolution to satisfy the requirements for a CESA ITP.

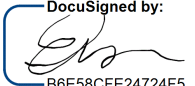
- 8) Translocation/Salvage of Plants and Animal Species. Translocation and transplantation is the process of moving an individual from a project site and permanently moving it to a new location. CDFW generally does not support the use of translocation or transplantation as the primary mitigation strategy for unavoidable impacts to rare, threatened, or endangered plant or animal species. Studies have shown that these efforts are experimental and the outcome unreliable. CDFW has found that permanent preservation and management of habitat capable of supporting these species is often a more effective long-term strategy for conserving sensitive plants and animals and their habitats.
- 9) Compensatory Mitigation. An environmental document should include mitigation measures for adverse Project related direct or indirect impacts to sensitive plants, animals, and habitats. Mitigation measures should emphasize avoidance and reduction of project-related impacts. For unavoidable impacts, on-site habitat restoration or enhancement should be discussed in detail. If on-site mitigation is not feasible or would not be biologically viable and therefore not adequately mitigate the loss of biological functions and values, off-site mitigation through habitat creation and/or acquisition and preservation in perpetuity should be addressed. Areas proposed as mitigation lands should be protected in perpetuity with a conservation easement, financial assurance and dedicated to a qualified entity for long-term management and monitoring. Under Government Code, section 65967, the Lead Agency must exercise due diligence in reviewing the qualifications of a governmental entity, special district, or nonprofit organization to effectively manage and steward land, water, or natural resources on mitigation lands it approves.
- 10) Long-term Management of Mitigation Lands. For proposed preservation and/or restoration, an environmental document should include measures to protect the targeted habitat values from direct and indirect negative impacts in perpetuity. The objective should be to offset the project-induced qualitative and quantitative losses of wildlife habitat values. Issues that should be addressed include (but are not limited to) restrictions on access, proposed land dedications, monitoring and management programs, control of illegal dumping, water pollution, and increased human intrusion. An appropriate non-wasting endowment should be set aside to provide for long-term management of mitigation lands.

Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the NOP for the SR-39 Reopening Project to assist Caltrans in identifying and mitigating Project impacts on biological resources. If you have any questions or comments regarding this letter, please contact Erika Cleugh, Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist), at (562) 619-5228 or via email at Erika.Cleugh@wildlife.ca.gov.

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Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Erinn Wilson-Olgin
Environmental Program Manager I
South Coast Region

cc: CDFW

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